RESTORATION REVIEW

The answer is not to debate our differences, which never settles anything, but to accept each other in spite of differences, and to recognize the validity of each position, even if we do not personally agree. We can disagree agreeably. And we can honor the fact that each one is loyal to "the authority" over us all, Jesus Christ our Lord. And that we all respect the authority of the Bible. We simply interpret it differently, not in regard to basic truth, but in theories, opinions, and deductions of our own.

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Fallacies Related to "The Authority of the Bible"

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The Sense of Scripture: Studies in Interpretation . . .

FALLACIES RELATED TO "THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE"

Since the Scriptures nowhere make an emphatic claim for themselves as authoritative, it is odd that we have made so much of "the authority of the Bible." While I definitely believe in the authority of the Bible, it is an authority that is derived from a higher authority and is always subject to that higher authority, which is God himself. The Bible always points to the authority of God rather than to its own authority. The doctrine of the authority of the Bible is therefore more of a deduction than an explicit teaching. Moreover, there is an ambiguity about it, for some things in the Bible are more authoritative than other things, if by "authority" we refer to laws and principles to five by. We all are far more impelled by the Golden Rule than by the dietary laws of Leviticus, and far more by the 23rd Psalm than by many other Psalms.

While I was preparing this essay I had occasion while visiting a class at a Baptist church to learn more about what people mean by authority. I was in conversation with the man who sat beside me, who had told me about the devotionals he and his wife had on a daily basis. He was obviously a sincere and devoted Christian, a working man. I noticed that his Bible was well-worn from years of use. "You consider the Bible authoritative, I presume," I said to him, and when he responded with an emphatic and yet humble yes, I asked him what he meant by that. I wanted him to use some term beside authority so as to ascertain just what he meant. He thoughtfully replied, "When it tells me how to live and how not to live." The profoundest theologian could hardly beat that! While this man was a fundamentalist Christian, he conceded that there were numerous things in Scripture, such as the endless genealogies and all the "begets," that did not tell him how to live and how not to live and therefore not authoritative. He agreed that things in the Bible can be inspired (or given of God) without being authoritative for him, for much of it was given to a particular people in a particular circumstance and not universally applicable.

That humble man stated in very simple terms part of what I want to say in this article, and his wisdom could deliver us from numerous fallacies related to "the authority of the Bible," one of which is the presumption that we have "the gospel truth" simply by quoting the Bible. The Bible is a book that is to be properly interpreted and meaningfully applied to our lives. Until it is it cannot be authoritative to us, for no one is responsible for what he does not understand or for what he sees as irrelevant to his life. But this does not excuse willful neglect. We are always obligated to search after truth, for there may be many things in Scripture that we do not yet understand that are vital to our wellbeing. There is a vast difference between an

ignorance that one cannot help and the ignorance of an insincere heart, just as there is an important difference between unbelief and disbelief. It is always the disbeliever that is condemned in Scripture. It is noteworthy that Paul could refer to his earlier life in such terms as, "I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 13). His was unbelief, not disbelief, for according to Acts 23:1 Paul was always sincere before God. But it is nonetheless true that nothing can be authoritative to us except as we come to understand it and find it relative to our lives.

Paul had little to say about authority, but he gives us one pungent line in Rom. 13:1, "There is no authority except from God." We can only conclude that if he thought of Scripture as authoritative (He did have what we call the Old Testament), it would only be in an indirect way. And when our Lord referred to the subject he said, "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth," which should cause us to think more in terms of the authority of Christ. Whatever authority we see in Scripture it must be subjected to the Lordship of Christ.

I propose this thesis for your consideration: the Bible is authoritative to us to the extent that it reveals the will of God for our lives today, especially as this is made evident in our Living Pattern, the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that it is Jesus Christ that is our authority, and to the degree that the Scriptures point us to him they are authoritative. He is our Pattern for "How we are to live and not to live," as my Baptist friend put it. The thesis also recognizes the will of God (or the word of God) as our authority, and it is important to distinguish between the Bible and the will or word of God. While it is true that God speaks to us through the Bible, it is not true that everything in the Bible is God speaking. Is it not also true that God has spoken other than through the Bible?

Some people suppose that that great line in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path," refers to the Bible, including that verse! The word of God came to David in various ways, but however it came it was his authority, if that is the word to use. And whenever the will of God speaks to us through Scripture, it is of course the rule of life for us.

One way for us to see what was authoritative to the early Christians is to project ourselves into their time frame. If you were a member of the church in Antioch of Syria in 40 A.D., what would have been authoritative to you? Your only "Bible" would be what we call the Old Testament, and since you would probably be a Gentile, being in that first Gentile church, your main interest in those ancient Scriptures would be in what they reveal by way of prophecy concerning the One you have accepted as the Savior of the world. You would have some acquaintance with the apostle Paul since he visited your church now and again, and since he was a chosen envoy of Jesus Christ, duly called to be an apostle, he would be an authority to you. But would not "authority" in this context mean that since Paul had seen Christ and had

received revelations from him as an apostle that he was able (or had power, which is what authority means) to disclose to you things about Jesus Christ? In short, Jesus Christ would be your only authority in that he would be your only Savior. Those whom he called to be apostles (and subsequently their writings) would be authoritative only in an indirect way, in that they were "the first to trust in Christ" (Eph. 1:12), and were especially chosen to hear witness of him.

One thing is certain, the New Testament as such would not be your authority since it did not then exist. Surely you would have insisted that in having Jesus Christ you had all you needed. Moreover, you would have the leading of the Holy Spirit, and an insatiable hunger to know more about Christ and to become more like him. Anything that would bring you closer to Christ, such as a letter from Paul or Peter, you would consider authoritative, and for that reason.

All this should mean at least this: that we be more conscious of the authority of Christ in our lives. Whatever we make of "the authority of the Bible" it must stand in judgment of the authority of Christ. If Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath he is also the Lord of the Scriptures. If the Pharisees, who fastidiously believed in the authority of the Bible, could doggedly "search the Scriptures" and yet miss the Christ who was revealed therein, then we too might miss the Lordship of Christ in our lives through a view of Scripture that comes close to being bibliolatry.

Another fallacy related to the authority of Scripture was recognized by Shakespeare when he had one of his characters to complain:

> What damned error, but some sober brow
> Will bless it and approve it with a text.

There may be something to the old saw that "You can prove anything by the Bible" if the Bible is made into a proof-texting source of authority. But if what we make the Bible to mean has to pass the test of truth that is evident in the spirit of Jesus Christ, then we can't prove anything by the Bible. We can always bring judgment upon others by quoting Scripture, whether the divorced or those "not of us," just as we can find approval for what we want approved, whether war or apartheid or growing rich. But the verdict may well be different when laid at the feet of Him whom God has given "All authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:19).

But someone will ask how we can know about Christ except from what the Bible tells us. That is what makes the Bible authoritative, that it tells us about Christ. But it is not a matter of cold words upon a page. There is the leading of the Spirit, and he or it is our teacher even with the Bible in hand. And "beyond the sacred page" (Remember, we sing that!) there emanates

the spirit of Christ. While "the gentleness and meekness of Christ" is rooted in the Bible it reaches beyond the Bible into our hearts, and "We know" because the truth of Christ bears witness to our inner mind. Otherwise Paul would never have written to a young church, "May the eyes of your understanding be enlightened so that you may know" (Eph. 1:18). There is more to knowing than simply reading and quoting the Bible

So, I am saying that it is *truth* that is our authority, truth as revealed by God himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. And truth is always an event concerning a person, not a document or a book. A book may record the truth or tell about it, but is not the truth itself. An example of this is a newspaper. "The Daily News" is really not the news at all, but only a chronicle of the news, whether an earthquake in Chile or the election of a President. The newspaper is only paper and ink, not news, for the news is the events it tells about. The truth is in the events themselves.

The Bible is like that. It is not itself the good news or the truth, but the events it relates. The event of Jesus Christ in human history is the greatest of all truth, that he was indeed the Son of God and that through his life, death and resurrection we have hope of eternal life. The event of Jesus Christ is centered in certain established facts, which is what truth always *is, facts.* And we are not to theorize about facts, only believe them and act upon them. This brings us to the greatest fallacy of all, and that is to equate our theories and deductions with the authority of the Bible.

We do this when we presume that anyone who does not accept our theory or deduction does not really believe in the authority of the Bible, for if he did he would agree with us! Only those of us who are "right" really believe in the authority of the Bible! Editors are often afflicted by this fallacy. One editor insists in his columns that the real difference between the Christian Church and the Church of Christ is not instrumental music, but "a difference in attitude toward the authority of the Bible." And this is not in reference to *the facts* of Scripture, which is where authority lies, but a mere opinion concerning which the Bible says nothing. And yet this is deemed to be so important that it calls for a breach of fellowship.

There is a second editor that I read who makes such cooperative endeavors as Herald of Truth a test of fellowship. He agrees with editor no.1 that the Christian Church brother should not be fellowshiped, but neither will he fellowship editor no 1. And the real issue, he insists, is the authority of the Bible!

Editor no.3 is a gentle soul who finds no authority for "classes" in the teaching of the Bible. He joins editor no.1 in opposing instrumental music and editor no 2 in opposing both instruments and agencies, but he fellowships neither no 1 or no.2 since they have Sunday School. And what is this all about? The authority of the Bible!

Editor no.4 is a dear brother that I love with all my heart, and I understand where he is coming from when he objects to individual communion cups. After all, Jesus took "the cup," so why have all those plastic cups? He agrees with editor no.1 on instrumental music, with editor no 2 on instrumental music and agencies, with editor no 3 on instruments/agencies/ classes. But he disfellowships all three because they have cups. He believes that he is accepting "the authority of the Bible" while they are not.

There are other editors that I do not always read. Editor no.5 draws the line on instruments/ agencies/classes/cups, but also on unfermented grape juice. He will not fellowship any of the others, not even his fellow "one cup" brother because he does not use wine like the Bible clearly "authorizes."

I am not poking fun. These are all my brothers whom I love in the Lord, and their positions are all understandable. But it is obvious that something is dreadfully wrong when each one argues that *he* is respecting the authority of Scripture and the others are not, and so they have no fellowship with each other. With "the authority of the Bible" on our lips we divide umpteen different ways. I am convinced that there is an answer to this ghastly situation.

The answer is not to debate the differences, which never settles anything, but to accept each other in spite of the differences, and to recognize the validity of each position, even if we do not personally agree. We can disagree agreeably. And we can honor the fact that each one is loyal to "the authority" over us all, Jesus Christ our Lord. And that we all respect the authority of Scripture. We simply interpret it differently, not in regard to basic truth, but in theories, opinions, and deductions of our own. We do not have to see or practice all these things alike, but we do have to love and accept each other even as Christ loves and accepts all of us, warts and all. If we do not we can hardly claim the Lordship of Christ over our lives, even if we can quote a string of prooftexts proving we are right and all others wrong.

Paul gives us the answer in 2 Cor. 1:20 when he says that all the promises of God are Yes in Christ. The next verse notes that it is in Christ that God establishes us, and in verse 22 he tells how God has sealed us through the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that all the promises in Christ will be realized.

There is our authority. If we always say *yes* to Christ, we will have no problem accepting each other. And when the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart and in my heart that is what makes us one, not conformity to a lot of prooftexts. And the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts serves as a guarantee that all God's promises in Christ will be ours for sure. How could we have a greater motivation for "How to live and how not to live" than that? - *the Editor*

There should be in the life of the Christian a certain calm. A worried Christian is a contradiction in terms. A Christian is by definition a person who has that inner strength which enables him to cope with anything that life can do to him or bring to him. - *William Barclay*

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THREE CHURCHES SIDE BY SIDE

It is not unusual for three churches to be in close proximity, but it hardly ever happens for three churches to be side by side in the same block and on the same side of the street. Such is the case in the Lake Highlands section of Dallas, which may not be part of the famed "North Dallas Forty," but is an affluent part of the metroplex nonetheless. Counting their parking lots, the churches occupy virtually an entire city block. All three churches have impressive edifices. It is interesting to watch them park their cars, sometimes head on, and repair to their separate churches.

The churches are the St. James Episcopal Church, which anchors the corner, and then the Lake Highlands Church of Christ and the Highland Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It was the latter that invited me to address their combined adult classes on the Disciples heritage in celebration of the Alexander Campbell bicentennial. The series ran for three Sundays. The first Sunday I was there I remained for the main assembly and was edified by a fine presentation and was blessed in meeting many sisters and brothers. Following my discourse on the second Sunday I went next door to the Church of Christ and heard my old friend Jim Reynolds and enjoyed fellowship with a congregation I have long known and where I have numerous friends, including readers of this journal.

Both of those Sundays I drove by the Episcopal Church, which gnawed on my conscience somewhat. "Why don't I visit there too, for I also have brothers and sisters in that church," I kept saying to myself. So on the third Sunday I arrived early enough to attend the coffee hour fellowship at the Episcopal Church and remain for Sunday School. The Episcopalians make it convenient for those of us who like to visit them and yet attend our own church, for they get started earlier than we do. I had the pleasure of sitting in a small class taught by the rector of the church, the Rev. Joel B. Reed, whom everyone calls Joel. I was impressed by the seriousness with which they approached the Scriptures in a verse by verse study. I felt free to join in and I did.

A lady in the class brought some exciting news with her, and we spent some time rejoicing in the Lord over it. A clergy friend of hers had just returned from Russia and told of how he had seen churches in that country overflowing with devout and committed worshippers. At an Easter service more than 1,000 people stood for hours into the early morning in adoration of

the risen Christ. Her friend told of how he would appear on the streets of Russian towns in his clerical garb and people would come up to him and kiss his hand and show him the cross they wore about their necks, usually hidden from view of the authorities. "I am a Christian," they would say, "and I will no longer try to hide it." Joel noted at this point that the Russian Orthodox Church had generally capitulated to Communist authorities in the Soviet union, but there was evidence that this was changing and that the authorities have a Christian renewal movement on their hands that they don't know how to handle. We talked about how different it was in Nazi Germany where the confessing church was willing to die as martyrs for its faith. I observed that we are often reminded, and properly so, of the millions of Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis, but it is not generally recognized that millions of Christians also died, and theirs was voluntary in that they could have bowed the knee to Nazism but refused to do so. The "witnessing church" in this context refers to the persecuted or martyred church.

It was an act of worship itself to see how this small Episcopalian class identified with the persecuted Christians in the faraway Soviet union. We all shared in a fellowship with those who would bare a hidden Cross and proclaim their faith to one who himself bore witness to what he believed by the way he was dressed. "Faith of our fathers! living still, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword."

Part of my reaction to this was that if Christians can be concerned for their fellow believers half way around the world, they should at least be on speaking terms with those who are next door to them. So I told each church that I visited what I was doing in the community and that I wanted them all to get better acquainted with each other. Three churches side by side may represent separation among Christians but they do not have to represent the divisive and sectarian spirit. Even in separation we can reach out to each other, and we might even do some things together.

I was of course especially concerned that the Christian Church and the Church of Christ draw closer to each other. It doesn't make sense for two churches next door to each other, who share the same heritage as part of a unity movement, have nothing to do with each other. So, when I was visiting at the Church of Christ I made it clear what I was doing next door, "reviewing our common heritage, which applies to us as much as to them," I would say, my pronouns revealing what they already knew, that I belong to the Church of Christ. And when I learned that their ministry to the Cambodians was crowding their facilities, I ventured "Wouldn't it be great if your Cambodian ministry overflowed into the Christian Church next door?" I got not only a positive reaction to this suggestion, but also an attitude of loving acceptance toward the neighbors next door.

One couple in fact sent me a letter that week, welcoming me to their service and pleased that I could be with "our brothers and sisters next door." Our brothers and sisters next door! That is the kind of spirit I have been working for all these years. We don't have to agree on everything, but for Christ's sake we must accept each other even as he has accepted us.

I took that letter with me the next Sunday to read to the Christian Church folk, for I knew that some of them had had a different kind of experience with Church of Christ folk. "You see that the folk next door think of you as their brothers and sisters in Christ. What we all need to do now is to act that way," I told them.

It went well with what we were studying. We began as a movement to unite the Christians in all the sects. Alexander Campbell believed he had discovered the principle upon which all Christians could be united, the essence of which was that believers can unite upon the essentials of the Christian faith and allow for differences in areas of opinion. Once his own people united upon that simple plea, Campbell asserted that they would never divide, not so long as they were faithful to that principle. Now that we have come to that point in our history that two of our churches can exist side by side and have no fellowship between them, we can only conclude that Campbell's principle is wrong or that we have been unfaithful to it. It may be a matter of our resolving to become what we are.

If no man is an island unto himself, as the poet assures us, then no church is. Every church that professes to be Christian should consider itself apart of all those churches that make the same profession. A good place to start in showing that kind of spirit is with the nearest church. When three churches are lined up side by side, all professing to follow Christ and all praying to the same God, and yet having nothing to do with each other, it serves as a grim reminder of the great scandal of Christianity, division among Christians.

It will help some if when we pass the church next door or the one down the street we can say in our hearts, "We all have a great deal in common so long as we worship the same Christ," and breathe a prayer for the unity of all God's people - as our Lord did. - *the Editor*

DIVERSITY IS NECESSARY TO UNITY

While there may certainly be diversity without unity, there can never be unity without diversity. It is true of all that is beautiful, whether a painting or a symphonic composition, that variety and diversity are so mingled in creating symmetry as to make for something lovely. It is true of all nature, whether a single atom or our entire solar system, that its diverse elements are so proportioned as to make for unity and orderliness. To achieve symmetric beauty and

order a bouquet of flowers or the planets in their orbit do not have to bring their diverse elements into conformity or sameness, which would be an absurdity anyway, but only to bring their various elements into the orderly scheme of their Creator.

Plato wanted his students to watch the behavior of the planets, thinking it would build order into their lives. It is the unity in God's diverse cosmos that staggers the imagination and arouses wonder in man's mind. The unity and diversity of the Bible is no less marvelous to behold than the wonders of the universe.

It would be folly to suppose that the church of God on earth would be anything different. The unity for which Jesus prayed had to be a unity in diversity, for the background of the apostles ranged from that of a Roman tax collector on the left to a dagger-carrying Zealot on the right. But it was Jesus who made them one in Himself, making them brothers together by the gospel. True evangelism conforms men to the likeness of God through Jesus, while it takes indoctrination to conform them to a sect or party. Conformity to doctrine may be necessary for fellowship among sectarians, but it is conformity to the likeness of Christ that makes men children of God, and surely there is a vast difference between the two. Those who are thus conformed to God by transformation of fife enjoy unity in diversity. There can of course be no other kind of unity, man's nature and God's nature being what they are. If God made man to be free, and if indeed man is free, then diversity is necessary.

The scriptural images of the church make unity in diversity an obvious fact. The church is both as much one and diverse as a human body: "For Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body" (1 Cor. 12:12). It is this diversity in the Body that challenges the church to be united: "But God has combined the various parts of the body, giving special honour to the humbler parts, so that there might be no sense of division in the body, but that all its organs might feel the same concern for one another" (1 Cor. 12:24-25*)*.

Marriage provides another image, with the church as the Bride of Christ, and what serves as a more beautiful picture of unity in diversity than the oneness of a man and his wife. As Phillips' rendition of Eph. 5:32 puts it: "The marriage relationship is doubtless a great mystery, but I am speaking of something deeper still — the marriage of Christ and his Church." In terms of the problems that divide us, this image of oneness may be more practical than we realize, for every married person realizes that it is love and devotion that holds a marriage together, not conformity of viewpoint.

The last one of us would have to denounce his marriage and "withdraw" from his partner if the basis of unity was unanimity of opinion. We can only conclude that it is love that "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14), and that it is something less than love that has caused all the divisions. Any marriage could end in a day if love did not hold it together.

The marriage symbol is extended to include the family, for God's church is referred to as His household, with all of us as brothers and sisters together (Eph. 3:14-15). God chooses us to be His sons, the Holy Spirit confirming this by crying "Abba, Father" within us (Gal. 4:6).

It is not that we select each other as brothers, like we might choose fraternity buddies. All who are in God's family are brothers and sisters, and the Spirit does not have to get an OK from any of the rest of us before He dwells within them as the Guest of heaven. The question of fellowship is just that simple: all in whom the Spirit dwells share in the common life (which is what fellowship means) and they are made one by His presence. If we do not determine in whom the Spirit dwells, then we do not determine who is in the fellowship, however much different he may be from ourselves.

If it is necessary for us to be different in our physical and psychological makeup in order to he free individuals before God, then it is essential that we be different in our spiritual or religious makeup and for the same reason. We cannot be free spirits if we are but clones of each other. This is the beauty of Christian unity, that we can all be different in our thinking (and even be wrong!), and yet "all speak the same thing" when it comes to what really matters. We are not really free in Christ until we realize that a sister or brother may be wrong about a lot of things and still be right about Jesus Christ. It is the circumcision of the heart that really counts, if we can rely upon the testimony of Scripture.

Unity is one of the essential traits of the true Church of Christ on earth, along with holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The true church cannot be divided any more than it can be parochial or unholy. So unity is not merely desirable; it is essential. And that unity is necessarily diverse, for otherwise it would not be unity. — *the Editor*

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Visiting Other Churches: No.5...

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE: "MIND-HEALING"

Did you know there is a church that observes Communion Sunday without actually taking Communion? They take it "spiritually" in their minds and not "materially" in terms of bread and wine. They thus "think" through the service without being bothered by material appurtenances. That Jesus himself found meaning in such symbols as bread and wine does not dissuade them as they move on up to a higher spiritual plane.

Such is typical of Christian Science, which categorically affirms that matter does not exist. And so poverty, injustice, sickness, and death do not really exist, for "God is All." These are but "the illusory effects of mortal mind," as *The Christian Science Journal* puts it. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, in her *Science and Health and Key to the Scriptures* instructs her disciples how to respond to an injury suffered in an accident: *declare that you are not hurt.* It is not surprising, therefore, that her disciples would celebrate Communion strictly on a mental plane.

In searching for a word to describe a Christian Science service I cannot do better than funereal, which is not necessarily a criticism. It is solemn, dignified, and simple, but it is also stodgy. One might get the distinct impression that the mortician will soon wheel in the coffin, even if there is no such thing as death. While waiting for the service to begin the visitor is faced by a white-gloved usher at the head of either aisle, whose function never became clear to me after two visits, except that they resume their stations each time the congregation stands to sing, and they *always* stand to sing.

The service is radically unorthodox. While there is an organ prelude, there is not much else that a typical Christian would find familiar. One of the readers begins the service by explaining that the Denton congregation is a branch of the Mother Church of the Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts, founded by Mary Baker Eddy for the purpose of restoring primitive Christianity in reference to healing. I did not realize that the "Scientists," as they call themselves, also consider themselves restorationists, a common concept in sectarian circles. The sects all have a different emphasis upon what is to be "restored," the Mormon view being the most elaborate. I can only regret that Churches of Christ/Christian Churches have yet to overcome the myth of "the restored church." One thing is obvious: all restorationists have their own select list of what constitutes the true restored church. The Scientists are satisfied to emphasize healing.

The reader also tells about their Reading Room, which is maintained in every Christian Science community, located in this case on our courthouse square. He also explains that the service we are entering into is the same in all Christian Science churches the world over, the same text, prayers, hymns, and the same reading lesson, which is in lieu of a sermon. Mary Baker Eddy forbade any interpretation of the Scriptures in the pulpit except her own, and no preaching.

There are two readers, a man and a woman, who follow a prescribed list of readings from both the Bible and Mrs. Eddy's *Science and Health.* One reads the Bible, the other from Mrs. Eddy, selections that presumably interpret the Bible. There are six segments of readings with upwards of thirty references from the two sources, which takes about *25* minutes, nearly half of the service.

When they said the Lord's Prayer together, I remembered the chaplain who thought he had found in that prayer the one thing that all Christian services include, until he attended a non-Science Church of Christ! But the Scientists are unorthodox even in saying the Lord's Prayer, for again they have interspersed between the petitions embellishments by Mrs. Eddy. The responsive reading is from the Bible and an offering is taken, shades of orthodoxy!

The readers are professional, elected by the congregation for a three year period and are paid. Considerable preparation is required in order to do such an excellent job. There is no pastor or anything equivalent thereto. A congregation may have a practitioner who is duly approved by the Mother Church to minister in healing, but he or she has no part in public worship unless also elected to be a reader. To be ordained a practitioner one has to show evidence of having ministered in at least two healings. There are thousands of practitioners all over the world: 37 in Argentina, 12 in New Zealand, over 100 in West Germany, 46 in Africa, 31 in Dallas, and one in Denton. They are all members of the Mother Church in Boston.

Like the Unitarians who also emphasize things of the mind, a Christian Science congregation will predictably be made up of those from the upper socio-economic class. But unlike the Unitarians who are vigorous in their concern for social justice, the Scientists appear to be preoccupied with mind-healing and are not known to be involved in ameliorating human suffering, except to deny that it really exists. In reading the *Christian Science Journal*, a monthly publication, one finds no references to such problems as poverty, racism, abortion, terrorism, starvation, or even AIDS, unless it is to dismiss them as "mortal beliefs" and "illusory effects." They say they address such problems through their world-wide healing ministry by such methods as Jesus used rather than by modern medicine. In fact a practitioner will not minister to a patient if he also relies upon medicine or goes to a physician or a hospital. Neither will a practitioner pray for healing if there is anyone in the room who does not believe in it. They also have certified nurses who assist in this ministry.

There is currently a highly publicized case in the courts of a Scientist couple who is accused of criminal neglect for denying their child, now deceased, the advantages of medical science. While such experiences sometimes drive people from Christian Science, the Scientists themselves have an answer. When a spokesman for the Mother Church was asked about this case, he calmly and persuasively responded, "If a doctor does not have to explain when a child dies after medicine is used, why does a practitioner have to explain when prayer is used?"

They are the only denomination that publishes a world-wide "secular" newspaper, which happens to be one of the best in the business. Founded by Mrs. Eddy herself, the *Christian Science Monitor* sees itself as part of the healing ministry in that it reports the news factually without damaging those who make the news. As a regular reader of the *Monitor* I can testify

that this is the case. It is probably the most unbiased newspaper in the world, and except for a column on the back page of a "spiritual" nature all its 32 pages are filled with penetrating news items that really come to grips with our everyday world.

Christian Science is sometimes accused of speaking two languages, one spiritual and the other secular, one that denies the material world and all its hideous evils and the other that recognizes its reality. Nowhere is this more evident than in the *Monitor.* A 1987 issue of the *Christian Science Journal* said this about the *Monitor:*

> It can be only as free from news of sin, conflict, inhumanity, crime, terrorism, disease, accident, disaster and war as humanity itself is free from these ills. Nevertheless the truthfulness *that* the *Monitor* is pledged to uphold expresses *in* some degree divine Truth. And divine Truth has positive, healing effect because Truth is Spirit.

Doesn't that say that the world the *Monitor* tells us about, with all its sin, disease, and inhumanity, is *real?* Divine Truth is the answer, but that truth witnesses in a real world of crime and terrorism. That is what most all of us believe. But that is but one language that the Scientists speak. The other language says that these things do not exist and are but the creation of "mortal mind," their favorite term in explaining that sin, disease, and death are but illusions. Notice these words from the same journal.

> So our effort in Christ-healing isn't merely to change sick matter into well matter but rather to prove step by step the spiritual reality of God's kingdom. All is God and God's expression, His creation has to be spiritual and perfect. Matter doesn't exist in the first place.

Matter doesn't exist in the first place! This is not saying that matter is merely transient or that it is not as important as spirit, which we all more or less believe, but that it doesn't even exist. This is drawn from a false premise, also stated in the quotation, that God is everything and everything is God. Since God is Spirit and Truth and Perfection, then there can be nothing material, and no sin, disease, or death.

If the Scientists are right in their radical pantheism, that God is all and all is God, then we all face an impossible dilemma: how did this world that *the Monitor* tells us about ever come to exist - even as an illusion in our minds? How did matter come to exist even as the creation of "mortal Mind" if God is all there ever has been?

Mark Twain's response to Christian Science when it was only a budding religion underscores this "two language" fallacy. In his book on *Christian Science* he tells of his encounter with one of their practitioners after injuring his leg in a fall. The humorist tells in his inimicable way how she spent all her time trying to convince him that his injury wasn't real. "It hurts just as much as if it were real," he told her, an answer that lays bare the underbelly of Christian Science.

We are tempted to say to our Science friends, 'Why play the denial game? Oppression, injustice, drug abuse, cancer, and AIDS are out there in our world, and even if you call them "illusions" they hurt just as much as if they were real." They are as real as Jesus said they were: "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). Jesus did not deny the world's woes, he overcame them. In following him we can do likewise.

The language of Christian Science is the language of denial of all that a believing Christian holds dear, a denial so obvious that it is understandable that some of its critics insist that it is neither Christian nor Science. Angels are "exalted thoughts;" God is "Mind" or "Principle;" baptism (they do not baptize in any material way) is "spiritualized away;" prayer is "desire that is best expressed in thought and life." The test of any religion that claims to be Christian is its view of Jesus himself.

Here too the real historical Jesus is lost in metaphysical fog, such as Mrs. Eddy's "Jesus was the offspring of Mary's self-conscious communion with God" and "Jesus is the human man, and Christ is the divine idea; hence the duality of Jesus the Christ." Then there is "Jesus represented Christ, the true idea of God."

There is a vast difference between the apostolic proclamation, where sin is real and redemption is based on faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, and the message of Christians Science where "healing" is a matter of mental discipline. We would that they would listen less to Mrs. Eddy and more to the holy Scriptures. And that they believe!

What can we learn from the Scientists?, a question I ask in all my visits with the churches, and I always find something. Except perhaps for their dignity of worship I come away with virtually nothing. They remind me of the ancient Gnostics whose faith, even about Christ, was based upon a special knowledge of their own invention and that only for the initiated. As I visited with some of Science leaders in the foyer I inquired as to what steps one takes in becoming a Scientist. The answer was "It is a hard discipline." It is salvation by mental works!

I see no good news in that, no grace and no mercy. Even though the Scientists are my neighbors and I love them, I would send no troubled soul to them for succor. Even as a philosophy it is often viewed as sheer nonsense. Socrates would come nearer saving them than Mary Baker Eddy. —*the Editor*

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THE SURGICAL WORD OF GOD

William E. Bowles

One day amidst the agony and the ecstasy of studying the holy Scriptures I discovered a principle of interpretation that is embarrassingly simple and dreadfully demanding: *If the Bible says something you* do *not like you can be pretty sure it is the Word of God.*

It is easy to read commentaries that only please our "itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). I once literally burned a book that was offensive to my prejudices, but I now see that in doing so I only revealed my fear of the truth.

I was something like old King Ahab whose story is in 1 Kings 22, who summoned King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in a battle against Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat felt that the prophets of God should be consulted, and Ahab agreed. All 400 of "his" prophets spoke the *pleasing* Word of God: "Go into battle for the lord will give Ramoth-Gilead into the King's hand." Yet Jehoshaphat knew of one honest and courageous prophet of God who was willing to speak the Word of God even when it was not pleasing.

What follows in the story is an attempt by the in-house prophets to pressure Micaiah into speaking only a pleasing Word of God. After a mocking word, parroting the false prophets, Micaiah tells the terrible truth about Ahab's fate in the impending battle. Ahab found the Word of God so displeasing that he had Micaiah arrested. As the day of battle ended the prophet's word proved true, for King Ahab was mortally wounded and his army demoralized. The king of Israel learned too late that *If the prophet says something you do not like you can be pretty sure it is the Word of God.*

When King Jehoiakim of Judah heard the Word of God from a scroll written by the prophet 3eremiah, he found it so offensive that he threw it into the fire (Jer. 36).

Our Lord Jesus, anticipating the way the establishment in Jerusalem would reject him, cried out in agony, "0 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!" (Mt. 23:37). Even though he was the very Word of God enfleshed in person among them, "the way, the truth, the life" (Jn. 14:6), his Word was unpleasing to their ears.

Stephen was killed for the same reason his master was crucified. They closed their ears to him because the truth he spoke was too painful for them, calling for a transformation of life (Acts 7:57).

A church leader, Roy Lee Honeycutt, has given this painful verdict: "Even in our churches there may be cowardly persons who fear the truth, lazy persons who are satisfied with half the truth, and arrogant persons who believe they know all the truth." Again I propose this principle of interpretation: *If the Bible says something you do not like you can be pretty sure it is the Word of God.*

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews describes the piercing, penetrating Word of God as a surgeon's scalpel. It lances our spiritual infections and punctures our petty sectarian biases. He writes, "The Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Unless we are prepared to listen to the irritating and agitating Word of God, whether from a preacher, a waitress, or a mechanic, we will never be ready to fully appreciate and enjoy the comforting Word of God. The surgical Word of God is "inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16). — *16 E. Platte St., Colorado Springs, CO.*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

In an exclusive videotape U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop issued a strong challenge to Christians, "Don't let the Church see the challenge of AIDS and not respond. It's a great opportunity." He called AIDS "the new leprosy" in that those who have the disease are shunned by every one. He noted that it is often the case that AIDS victims have no one to turn to but Christians.

The Richardson East Church of Christ in Dallas was referred to in a cover story in *D Magazine* (D for Dallas) in reference to its outreach to AIDS victims. The magazine told the story of Ann (her picture was on the front cover) who was dying of AIDS, having become infected in a pre-marital relationship with a bisexual man. The virus showed up several years after she was happily married to someone else. Rejected by one church when it learned that she had AIDS, the Richardson East church, whose logo is CARE (Christians at Richardson

East) reached out to her with tender loving care. A recent bulletin from that church tells of her death and how her husband and children are loved and supported by the church. Larry James, who ministers at Richardson East, reports that the "hands on" acceptance of the sisters and brothers toward her was incredibly beautiful. It is also beautiful that a "secular" magazine would take note of one of our churches for its Christlikeness, referring to it as "one of the few conservative Protestant churches in the city that has not shied away from an AIDS ministry. It quoted the minister as saying, "You don't have to he pure to walk in our front door," which impressed the magazine.

The Worldly Church

In May I attended a seminar on "The Worldly Church," which is the title of a book 'written by three Church of Christ professors, at the Preston Rd. Church of Christ in Dallas. The thesis of the book, which has stirred some controversy, is that the Churches of Christ, like the world around them, have become secularistic in their attitudes and methods. They have measured "success" by worldly standards, and in their desire to satisfy the "felt needs" of their people they have lost the sense of the transcendence of God. The heart of the book is a six-point call for renewal, "Re- covering the Way," they call it, which are (I) a renewed attention to Scripture; (2) allow the Cross to stand at the center of our preaching and teaching; (3) a new open- ness to the power of the Holy Spirit; (4) a new clarity about Christian worship; (5) allow the power of God to make us a holy people; (6) recover the transcendence of God.

The authors expanded upon the thesis of the book at the seminar and there were responses. A large crowd from more than 30 Churches of Christ was on hand. The significance of both the book and the seminar, as I see it, is that our people have at last begun to criticize themselves from within the establishment. We have long been a people to examine and criticize others. If we are now becoming introspective and self-examining, there is promise of good things to come.

As for the book, I see encouraging signs, small things perhaps, such as the consistent use of "Church of Christ" rather than the fastidious and insipid "church of Christ," which I presume was concocted to save us from having a denominational name. And the best sentence in the book is the last one, "Only as we take these words to heart will we find our true identity as an authentic people of God." Praise the Lord! We have begun to speak of ourselves as "*an* authentic people of God" rather than "*the* authentic people of God."

But herein is the book's weakness, as I see it, for while it proposes to name our sins and issue a call for renewal it does not explicitly come to terms with our chief sin, our sectarian exclusiveness. So long as even the world can judge us as the people who think they are the only Christians and the only true church there is little need to talk of renewal in other areas. And so long as we refuse to accept other Christians as equals and to have no fellowship with

other followers of Christ we can hardly hope to be "an authentic people of God." And I would be hopeful that such a book would chide us for our view of "the restored church," which makes us one of the most divisive people in all the Christian world, and even makes acappella music a test of fellowship. That the book issues no call for us to once again be a unity people, our heritage being what it is, illustrates what has happened to Churches of Christ, which is that we are not a unity people. Even those who call us to renewal do not even mention it. I am persuaded that our people are ready to move in these directions, if only our leaders would lead them. And this we could do without compromising any truth we hold or endorsing any error we oppose.

But perhaps these things can come indirectly, and the authors of the book may be hopeful of that. After all, if we truly recover our place as "a people of the Book," as the authors call for, and if we draw upon the power of the Spirit and become a truly holy people of the Cross who are awed by the transcendence of God, sectarianism will lose its hold on us and we will once again be a people with a passion for the unity of all God's people. — *the Editor*

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READER'S EXCHANGE

Church Visits

I'm enjoying your series on your visits to the various denominations around Den- ton. I especially appreciated your open- minded treatment of the Unitarian-Universalists. I'm hoping for an article on the United Church of Christ. —*Indiana*

I really enjoy your articles on the different denominations. I have so much to learn. — *Louisiana*

Your article on the Episcopalians was very interesting. — *Missionary in Italy*

As a life long member of the Church of Christ, it is extremely refreshing to find someone who shares my belief relative to tolerance and consideration of other religious beliefs. I would like for you to forward all of your earlier publications per- taming to visits made by you in other churches. —Oklahoma

I read with great interest your visit to the Episcopal church, and look forward to more of these accounts. We were in Spain last month to visit our daughter and were pleased to worship with the Roman Catholics on Easter Sunday. — *Canada*

(Ouida and I have been pleasantly surprised by the vigorous and positive response to my series on my visits to the churches. We interpret it as an expression of the hunger Church of Christ people have for a broader fellowship that is denied them. It is common for a person to spend an entire lifetime in our churches and never see anyone in the pulpit except our own ministers, and they are made to feel they've Committed a sin if they visit any other church except for a wedding or a funeral. So, I will continue the series indefinitely, for there are lots of churches, and, as experienced as I am in ecumenicity, I still have new experiences, such as recently at an Eastern Orthodox Church, which I had to leave Denton to visit. The priest allowed me to remain for a private ceremony of infant baptism, which was an elaborate service that took almost an hour and was rich in tradition. I saw for the first time how meaningful such an experience can be to the family and the community of believers. The infant was immersed (up to the head) three times and in the nude. The priest then asked the child, "Are you in Christ?" His godparents answered for him, *Yes* (because he was part of the believing community), and the godparents vowed before God and the church to guard over the child's faith for life. At last the godparents placed the infant, now clad in glowing white, in the arms of his parents, duly baptized and confirmed, and the community rejoiced. I was touched. Afterward the priest asked me what I thought. "Lots of tradition, I presume," I answered. "Two thousand years' worth!," he replied. And when I said, "A Greek Orthodox may be our next President," he smiled. It was a great experience. I'll be telling you more about it. But I thought of that Greek community a short time afterward when I witnessed a baptism at a Church of Christ in the same city of Dallas. We did it in about eighty seconds and it was no big deal. But we're not yet 2,000 years old — or are we? However that may be, the Orthodox Church in Russia is this year 1000 years old. *—the Editor)*

The great tragedy of the Christian religion lies in the identification of the kingdom with the institutional church, whose leaders are its interpreters and rulers. Assuming the role of God's representatives they have used the Bible to erect structures of authority and systems of doctrines to manipulate people into conformity. Taught to have a high regard for the Bible, believers have been led to place ultimate dependence on those who interpret it as authority figures. The result is that the Bible itself and the authority figure become objects of faith and not the gospel, which created the Bible. *—Norman Parks, Murfreesboro, Tn.*

Frank Worgan of England said that in Ghana there are absolutely no divisions among the brethren. Whenever differences arise they get together and find a solution short of division. I asked him how this was possible, for in America we know more about division than unity. He gave as an example a difference about using multiple cups for communion. They allow each one to decide for himself, having different cups on the table. Our brethren in Ghana have

learned more about truth and right conduct than we have. Thank God, they understand that which causes our brethren to turn up their noses, namely, unity in diversity. - *Arnold Hardin, Dallas Tx.*

Please pray for me and our congregation. With freedom being so liberating, especially from being in bondage so long to traditionalism, I am afraid that a few among us may not be able to handle it. Freedom can be a scary thing. I hope that the false security that many derived from a legalistic system of keeping rules can be realized in the person and sacrifice of Christ. — *Texas*

Our Second Annual Chorus Festival is June 4, 1988. Ten Church of Christ choruses will spend the day rehearsing and being critiqued by Dr. Charles Nelson of ACU. The public is invited to the finale at 7:30p.m. when each chorus will perform and then join in a mass acappella choir of over 200 voices. - *Central Church of Christ, 1710 W. Airport Freeway, Irving, Tx*

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BOOK NOTES

A publication marvel is the new, fully *revised International standard Bible Encyclopedia* in four volumes, with each volume more than 1,000 pages. Beautifully bound and colorfully illustrated, it has articles on every place and person mentioned in Scripture. It is not only rich in archaeology and historical data, but it has articles on every major biblical theme. It is probably the most up40-date reference work avail- able. We highly recommend it as a library within itself. All four volumes for $159.95, postpaid, or you can purchase one volume at a time at $39.95 each, postpaid.

The publishers of Walt Yancey's *Endangered Heritage: An Examination of Church of Christ Doctrine* have labeled it "Controversial." While it may prove to be too painful for many *in* the Church of Christ, we owe it to ourselves to face the same judgments we have imposed on others. Walt draws heavily on the writings of the pioneers, quoting them at length on crucial questions, and shows that we have been less than faithful to our heritage or to Scripture. $12.50 postpaid.

I am now reading with great interest A *Life of Bishop John A. T. Robinson: Scholar, Pastor, Prophet* by Eric James. Not only does the book tell the engrossing story of a controversial bishop of the Church of England, who was the author of *Honest to God,* which sold a million copies, but it lays bare the political underbelly of that church. Those interested in the life of other churches will profit from it. $21.95 postpaid.

We will still send you 18 back issues of this journal for only $3.00, but at this price, which barely pays more than the postage, we select at random from our supply. If you are selective the price is 40 cents per copy. This offer is especially for our newer readers who would like to know what we have said back through the years.

We have long needed a hook that offers hope to the divorced, and Olan Hicks' *What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* does that. He challenges the contention that some divorced people do not have the right to remarry. $13.95 postpaid.

All books noticed in this column may be ordered from us at prices stated.

We still offer as a bonus *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett (value $21.95) when you send in 8 subs, new or renewal, at $3.00 per name (total $24.00) or you may order the hook at $21.95, and if you remit in advance we pay the postage.

You may order all five of our bound volumes of *Restoration Review,* which include the years 1977-1984, for only $40.00 postpaid. These are hard bound, matching volumes of high quality, with dust jackets.

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